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Forum: What Shall We Read?: These Stories Are Ours, Ivo Andric, The Bridge on the Drina

Tim Healy

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people. My family did not value books and, incongruous to my mother's vehement insistence that I get an education, our home contained only a set of outdated encyclopedias and five other books, including one novel: James Dickey's *Deliverance*. I knew some people who had books, and perhaps this is where my interest developed.

I can't say, really, when I began to love reading, but I found *Love Medicine* at a critical time in my development as a writer. In the middle of writing my first novel, I used the only model I had known, the work of Stephen King, his rural settings similar to my environment. However, I began to realize I was writing about the reservation and its unique culture and that the horror novel trappings were tangential at best. In finding Erdrich's novel, I came to the understanding that our lives, the lives of contemporary indigenous people, were as worthy of chronicling and celebrating as any other. Had I not found, at that particular time, strong echoes of my family and the ways we lived in the world, I might never have tried to go further in pursuing writing. I heard Erdrich's voice, strong and clear, recognized its celebratory tone and decided then to speak as well, finding the determination to add my voice, as it were, to the chorus of indigenous writers. ■

Eric Gansworth is a novelist and professor at Canisius College.

Drina and the little town of Vishegrad along its banks. He ordered the building of a great bridge that would make the lives of his people easier. It took seven long years to build the great stone bridge. As is true of so much that is new in life, the new bridge was not anticipated fondly by all. Some of those who sought to impede its growth paid a terrible price at the hands of the Turkish masters. But, as is also often true in life, the bridge born in blood and strife became the center of people's lives.

At the highest point on the great arch there stood a *kapia*, a wide place where stone seats had been carved out. And it was on this *kapia* that the young played their first games, where later they flirted and talked of love, where their wedding procession stopped to celebrate, where they debated the town's great matters over a cup of tea, and where in the end their funeral procession stopped one last time.

The Bridge on the Drina tells the little stories of these people through the centuries. But really these are our stories, our lives, our friends and family. These are the stories that all of us live because we are all really the same in the end, connected together by bridges seen and unseen, bridges that remind us that life is indeed an incomprehensible marvel. ■

Tim Healy is a retired engineering professor at Santa Clara University. For some wonderful pictures of the bridge see: <http://skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=222505>

THESE STORIES ARE OURS

Ivo Andric, *The Bridge on the Drina*

Tim Healy

'So, on the *kapia*, between the skies, the river and the hills, generation after generation learnt not to mourn overmuch what the troubled waters had borne away. They entered there into the unconscious philosophy of the town; that life was an incomprehensible marvel, since it was incessantly wasted and spent, yet none the less it lasted and endured 'like the bridge on the Drina.'"

In 1961 Ivo Andric was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, largely in recognition of his greatest novel, *The Bridge on the Drina*. The bridge was real. It was born in 1516 in the mind a ten-year old boy, torn from his mother's arms as part of a blood tribute to the Turkish Court. Decades later the boy, who had become Grand Vezir, remembered the swollen river